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SUBJECT: Serbian Reactions to PfP Invitation

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) 1. (SBU) President Tadic has warmly welcomed NATO's decision to invite Serbia to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP). In a statement to the nation, Tadic claimed credit for his own efforts and pledged that the invitation did not absolve Serbia of its outstanding ICTY commitments. FONMIN Draskovic and Minister of Defense Stankovic also issued positive reactions to the invitation. Prime Minister Kostunica's reaction has been disappointingly short-sighted and marginally defiant. He claimed that the invitation would reinforce NATO's respect for Serbia's territorial integrity (a reference to Kosovo final status), and he cited it as proof that conditionality as a policy is misguided. The PM's office has significantly played down the importance of the invitation as a step toward Serbia's Euro-Atlantic integration. SEPTTEL will report on our conversations with Serbian officials. End summary.

Belgrade Media Speculating on Membership

¶2. (SBU) Following days of speculation, news of an impending PfP invitation reached Serbia's airwaves late in the evening of 11/28. Interestingly, prime time coverage earlier the same evening reported the NATO SYG's announcement that Serbia, Montenegro, and B-H would not be invited into PfP. All major news outlets reported on 11/29 that NATO leaders in Riga would likely invite Serbia into PfP that day, with many speculating that membership would be conditioned in some way for Serbia and Bosnia. BETA News Agency additionally suggested that the last minute USG decision was a product of the White House overcoming strong objections in the Department of State, which opposed any relaxation of conditionality for PfP.

Government/DSS: Diplomatic Campaign Successful

¶3. (SBU) Reacting to the invitation on 11/29, PM Kostunica said that PfP membership will ensure Serbia's territorial integrity, including retention of Kosovo as part of Serbia. It was a welcome step at a moment when Serbia was fighting to keep its territory intact, he said, adding that he hoped it would influence Kosovo final status negotiations.

Kostunica also claimed that the invitation demonstrated that the process of European integration was continuing and that every attempt to set conditions for it is "wrong." Following initial reports late on 11/28 that a PfP invitation was in the offing, GOS spokesman Srdjan Djuric adopted a similar, marginally defiant tone. Djuric welcomed the prospect of an invitation, judging that it meant that NATO's policy of setting conditions on Serbia, which he assessed as negative for Serbia, has now been "abandoned." Djuric also asserted that PfP membership for Serbia would force NATO members to respect Serbia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, a clear reference to the Kosovo final status issue. Over the last two weeks, the PM, Djuric, and the DSS have repeatedly warned NATO member states not to violate "again" international law by recognizing an independent Kosovo.

Draskovic: PfP Membership Positive for Serbia

14. (SBU) FONMIN Vuk Draskovic also came out early and publicly in favor of the decision for Serbia's inclusion into PfP. Draskovic first called Ambassador Polt and informed him about what he would say in the press on the issue. Draskovic's statement, picked up by all media, said that he expected to hear good news from Riga, and said that he thought an invitation would arrive for Serbia's membership in PfP either on Wednesday, or shortly thereafter. Draskovic told B92 that the US and France were reviewing their firm stance on conditionality. (Comment: Draskovic, the foremost proponent of unconditional PfP membership for the last two years, has consistently told us that PfP before Mladic is the best way to ensure the general's eventual capture, and the best way to send a

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strong signal to anti-reformists in and out of the military that Serbia is irrevocably on the path to NATO and the EU. Draskovic also undoubtedly hopes to be associated with the decision as a way to boost his polling numbers ahead of the January 21 parliamentary elections. End Comment.

Tadic Welcomes PfP

15. (SBU) President Tadic welcomed Serbia's acceptance into PfP, saying that it is important for Serbian citizens, the state and the army. Tadic said that this invitation now was a result of the reforms made since 2003 (Comment: i.e., since he first began as Defense Minister and continuing through his tenure as President. End Comment) and noted that this was good news also for potential investors who will see PfP as a strong indication of Serbia's commitment to reforms. At the same time, Tadic stressed that PfP membership did not resolve the problem of ICTY cooperation. "Serbia must close out this issue, and all PIFWCs must be in The Hague," he said.

Defense Minister Positive on PfP

16. (SBU) Minister of Defense Stankovic has welcomed the invitation. Stankovic expressed dismay in a meeting earlier today with the British Ambassador and DATT that there was no advance confirmation that the invitation was going to be offered to Serbia, and he was displeased by what he perceived as efforts by the Kostunica government to take credit for it. Stankovic, along with other senior people in the ministry, have told us privately that they see the decision as a direct result of their lobbying efforts with NATO Embassies and intensive ongoing dialogue with NATO partners and DoD.

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